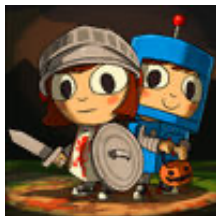


RPG Reload Special Edition – ‘The RPG Reload Christmas 2014 Extravaganza’

[December 24, 2014](#) by [Shaun Musgrave](#)



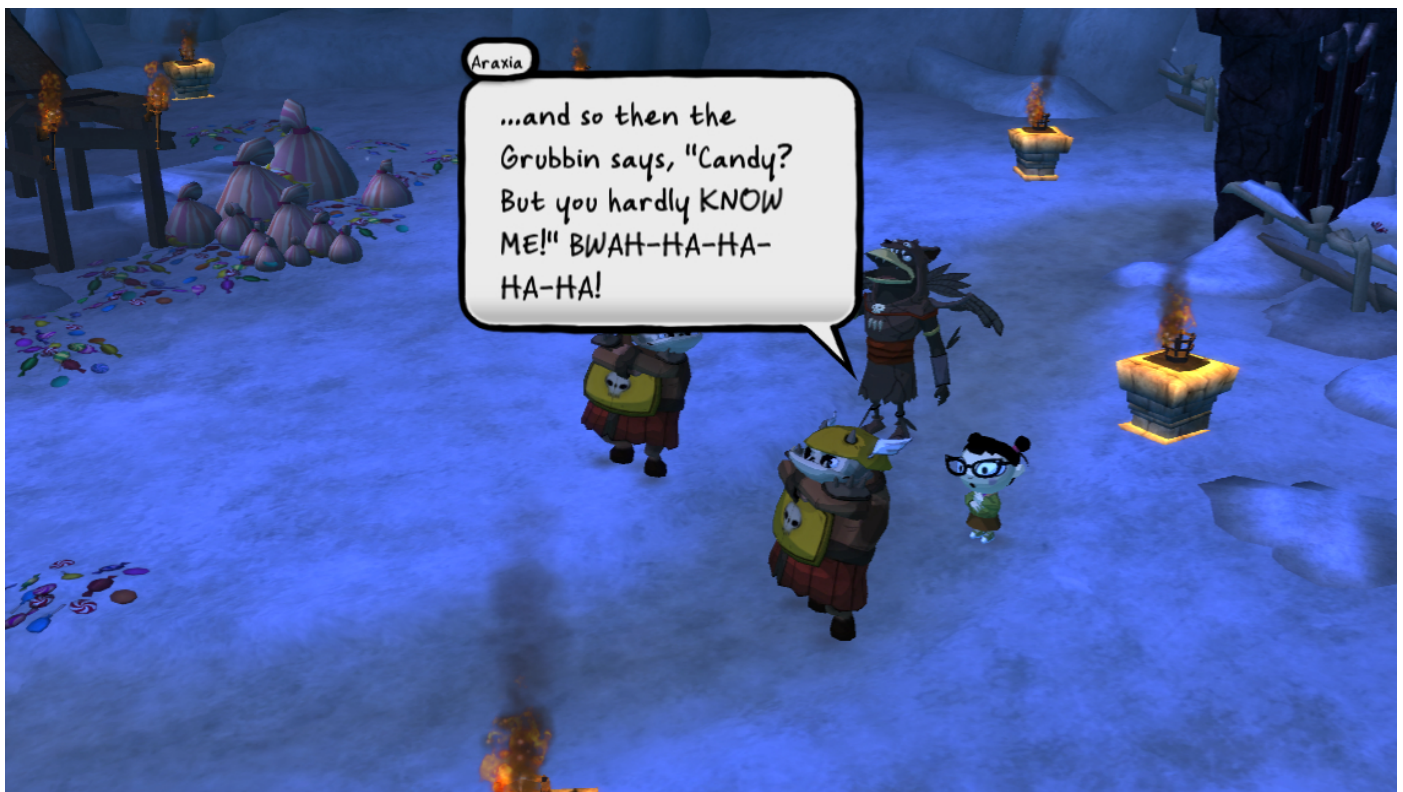
Hello, ye merry readers, and welcome to a very special edition of the **RPG Reload**, the weekly feature where we understand the true meaning of the season is having extra time off to play our RPGs. Each week we usually take a look at an RPG from the App Store's past to see how it holds up, but since I'm taking a rare Christmas holiday to my hometown in Canada this year, we're doing something a little different for the next couple of weeks. We'll be back to our normal schedule in January, but for the time being, let's spread a little holiday cheer with a special **RPG Reload**. Just because I'm slacking about, however, doesn't mean you get to relax! I need some votes for the next reader's choice feature, which will take place in **RPG Reload File 021** in January. Just mention the name you'd like to see in the comments below, the [Official RPG Reload Club thread](#) in the forums, or through the magic of Twitter by tweeting [@RPGReload](#). I'll be randomly selecting the winning game, so everyone has a chance, no matter how big or small the request.

So, back in October, I mentioned that Hallowe'en was my second-favorite holiday of the year, and you probably didn't need to be Nostradamus to guess what my first is. Friends, it's Christmas, that magical time of the year when the schlock is turned up to eleven, everyone is a little more kind, the food seems to have quadruple the calories, and of course, presents! As I've gotten older, I find I get more fun out of choosing and giving out presents

than actually receiving them, which makes the whole present thing quite the layered event, if you think about it. From when December starts each year, I don my Santa hat, and it only comes off when I take a shower, because Christmas! The lights, the colors, the repetitive Christmas carols, *Die Hard*... ah, I'm feeling very festive right now. For RPG players, though, a nice added benefit to the whole season is having some time off to really sink your teeth into a game or two.

So Shaun, if you really love Christmas more than Hallowe'en, why did you fork over the whole month of October to the latter while the former just gets one crummy week? That's a great question, person I just invented to segue into my next point. The answer is that while there are a couple of Hallowe'en RPGs and a pretty big selection of horror-themed RPGs, Christmas RPGs are virtually non-existent. Sure, I could cheat and use RPGs with a winter theme, but unlike horror and Hallowe'en, winter feels like little more than set dressing for Christmas, not evocative of what it's really about. So instead of trying to reach ridiculously with a whole month, I decided I would just pack in a few of the most appropriate sequences in RPGs that, for the most part, don't have a Christmas theme. All three games I'll be talking about today have had full **RPG Reload** articles in the past, but this special is focusing on their Christmas affiliation. Let's get started, shall we?

Costume Quest: Grubbins On Ice



Available as IAP within the main *Costume Quest* ([Free](#)) app for the low price of \$0.99, *Grubbins On Ice* is one of those holiday specials that doesn't directly name Christmas, but uses a proxy to explore similar themes. It has a good excuse, though, because it takes place in the world of the monsters. It makes sense that they don't have Christmas, and instead celebrate Yeti Fest, one of the finer traditions in Repugia. The story picks up a short time after the conclusion of the original game, with Everett and Lucy looking for some hard evidence of the monsters so they can prove it really happened. Well, that's what Lucy's interested in, anyway. Everett just seems to be sweet on Lucy and is following her around like a little puppy dog. Lucy finds her evidence and then some, however, and gets pulled into a portal to the monster world of Repugia. Everett calls on Reynold and Wren to suit up and head out on a rescue mission. When they get to Repugia, they find out that not everymonster is satisfied with the things Big Bones and his crew have been up to. The kids are recruited by fairly lazy revolutionaries and asked to go door-to-door to recruit.

The main goal is, of course, to rescue Lucy from the new big bad Araxia, who means to feed her and other children to Big Bones. The recruiting thing is

just there so that there's still a reason to trick-or-treat. *Grubbins On Ice* proceeds more or less in the same fashion as the base game, so there's still an awful lot of Hallowe'en in this Christmas episode. You'll use candy as currency, knock on doors to either friendly or hostile reception, collect parts to make new costumes, and of course, battle with monsters using the magical powers of your kid-constructed kits. If you start the expansion from a completed *Costume Quest* file, you'll retain all of your costumes and stamps, but you don't need to finish the main game to start a game of *Grubbins On Ice*. You'll start with a good assortment of costumes and stamps anyway. There are three new costumes to find in the expansion, including the pirate, the eyeball, and the yeti. You'll find the pirate and the yeti no matter what, with the pirate's traversal ability mandatory for completing the expansion and the yeti given to you after a required event, but the eyeball does take a little exploration.

It's a brief episode, with about two hours of content at the most, but it serves as a nice little extension of what *Costume Quest* does. I think it might have been better if the developers had found a way to go more all-in on Christmas the way they did with Hallowe'en, but that might be best left as a separate game entirely. It doesn't really capture the spirit of the holiday so much as it concerns itself with extending the original story by a month or so, and it leaves the door wide open for further expansions, presumably planned around other major holidays. Sadly, *Grubbins On Ice* would stand as *Costume Quest*'s sole expansion, and the sequel, *Costume Quest 2*, sort of washes its hands of that cliffhanger and goes back to a Hallowe'en focus. It seems like *Grubbins On Ice* is probably the closest thing we're going to get to a Christmas-themed RPG from the *Costume Quest* team, so I guess we just have to enjoy it for what it is.

Santa Score: 1/5. He doesn't even appear in *Grubbins On Ice*, and there's no proper proxy for him, either.

Festive Feeling Score: 2/5. It feels like a holiday, but it's the wrong one. It's

fun and all, but it doesn't quite scratch that Christmas itch. There isn't even a moral to the story this time!

Secret Of Mana – Ice Country



Here's the thing about Japan and Western holidays: I give them big points for enthusiasm, but the accuracy is sometimes a bit off. Christmas is huge in this country, to be sure, with beautiful light displays, Christmas carols playing in the shops, and Santa Claus lurking around just about every corner. On the other hand, it's a regular working day, the kids generally only get a single present, Christmas dinner is fried chicken from KFC, and the whole thing is seen less as a family thing and more as a romantic thing. I'll grant that it's a far more accurate picture of a Western custom than most of our ideas about Japanese customs, but given the context, it's not hard to see how something as weird as the Ice Country segment of Square Enix's fantastic action-RPG *Secret Of Mana* ([\\$7.99](#)) came about.

Depending on the order you've done things, you're either coming here fresh from helping out the mushroom people of Matango or having just escaped

from the prison of a desert-bound sandship. Either way, pretty normal fantasy fare, and Ice Country initially looks to be the same. You meet some peaceful creatures who are complaining about abnormal temperatures, battle through a forest of deadly wolves and hedgehogs, and come across a vacated cabin where a strange old man is said to live. At this point, *Secret Of Mana* takes a hard right turn into the bizarre, as you are approached by a reindeer who wants you to find his missing master. This reindeer has a red nose. Also, his name is Rudolph. So, yes, we need to rescue Santa. This is the basis of some of the finest Christmas entertainment of my childhood, so I am right on board. Like, sign me up to rescue Santa Claus, anytime.

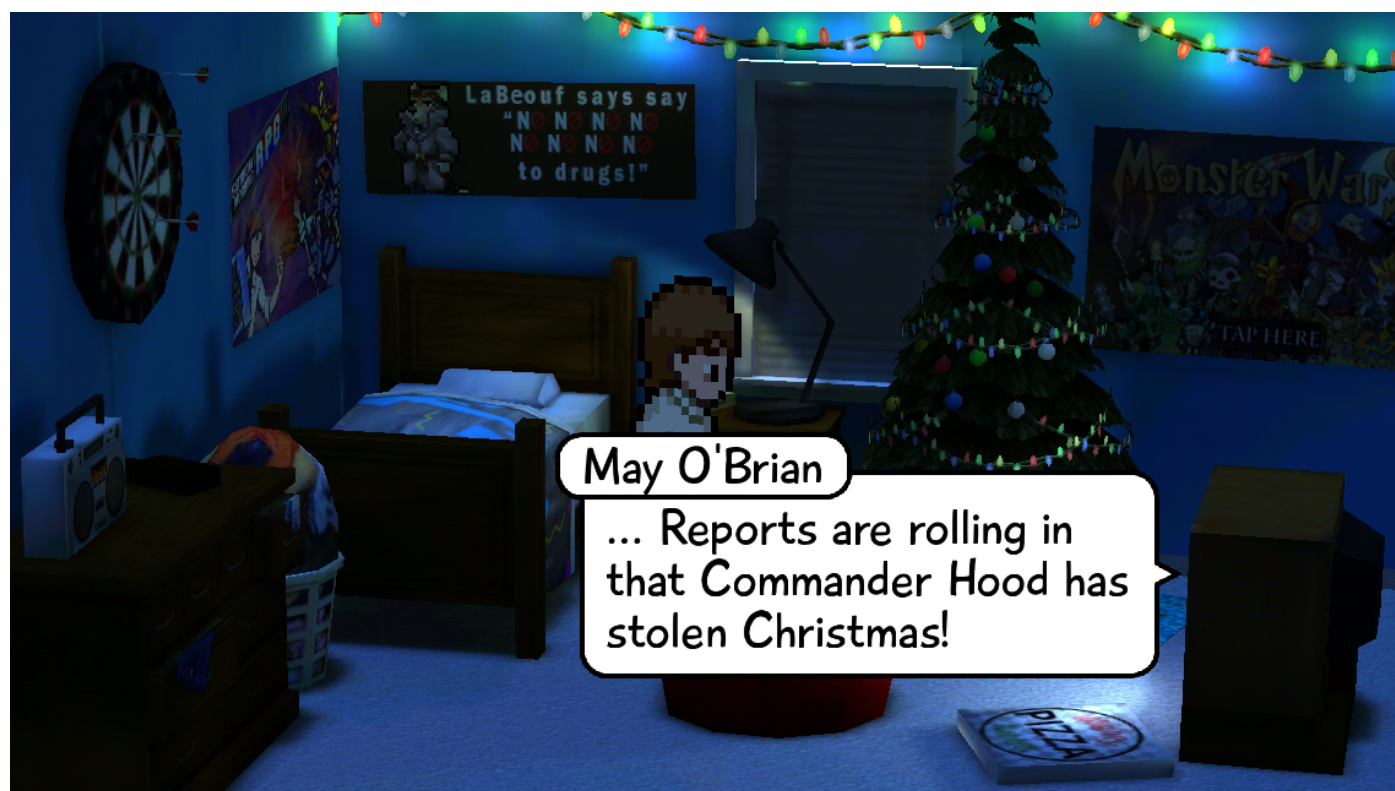
Rudolph says he was headed to the Ice Castle when he vanished, so off we go. It's a fairly dangerous place, filled with blue blobs, turtle warriors, and haunted books that sometimes flip open to a cheeky picture. After a lot of battles and a few traps, you finally meet the boss of the Ice Castle, who asks you to leave. If you refuse, you'll have a face-to-face fight with the Frost Gigas, a giant blue creature who casts powerful magic and does his best to thwart any attempts to take advantage of his weakness to fire. If you've trained up the sprite's fire magic, though, you can make pretty short work of him, leading to the usual victory fanfare. What happens next is far from usual, however.

It turns out the Frost Gigas was, yes, Santa Claus himself. You see, the children of the world stopped believing in him, and he thought to restore their faith by using the Fire Seed to grow a tree, or something like that. Instead, the Fire Seed grew him, turning him into a hateful monster. With his true form restored, he hands over the Fire Seed, and presumably Randi and friends get bumped up to the top of the Nice List. With the Fire Seed in hand, you're free to move on to the next segment of the game, which is back to the same old fantasy stuff. So there you go, friends. Santa exists in the same world as moogles, moogles exist in *Final Fantasy*, ergo Santa exists in the world of *Final Fantasy* and *that* is canon. Double-stamped, no take-backs.

Santa Score: 5/5. I mean, he's right there. You save him, by beating him up as a giant blue fiend. Even Rudolph makes the scene, though he's a lot more useless than usual. You're not going to get more Santa than this in a Square Enix JRPG, I'd argue.

Festive Feeling Score: 3/5. We've got Santa, Rudolph, snow, and a heavy-handed moral about faith, so we've definitely got some holiday spirit here. At the same time, the whole idea of beating the stuffing out of Santa while frying him to a crisp with fireballs seems to go against the meaning of the season.

Saturday Morning RPG – Episode 4, Ho Ho Hood



While the death of Saturday morning cartoons might change things for the next generation, for people around my age, Christmas is nearly synonymous with goofy special episodes of our favorite animated shows. Sometimes they would do a take-off of A Christmas Carol, while other times the heroes would have to rescue Santa Claus or save Christmas in some fashion. You could always count on December TV being full of these Very Special episodes, all

of which seemed to be working from the same few plots. Still, we got to see Super Mario dress up as Santa to deliver presents in a sleigh pulled by Yoshi, so it's hard to complain. I mean, even Skeletor caught the Christmas spirit once and saved some kids from Hordak. Truly, no villain is so contemptible that he or she can't have a change of heart in the Yuletide season. I mean, except Hordak. That guy's a jerk.

It's entirely appropriate, then, that *Saturday Morning RPG* ([Free](#)), a celebration of those wonderful cartoons/toy commercials of times past would have an entire episode dedicated to Christmas. *Episode 4: Ho Ho Hood* is a \$1.99 IAP in the regular version of the app, or a free download if you own the deluxe version, and it's well-worth checking out. Marty wakes up and finds his presents are missing, and a news report tells him he's not the only one with an empty tree. Halfway through the report, Commander Hood cuts in to inform everyone that since Santa Claws decided not to give him a present, nobody would get any presents. Marty's not having any of this, so he heads off to recover the presents and save Christmas. The whole snow-covered town is decked out in Christmas decorations, and a special Christmas version of the theme plays throughout the episode. Marty will have to travel all the way to Antarctica to recover the presents, but can Christmas truly be saved while Commander Hood is still intent on evil?

Like the other episodes of *Saturday Morning RPG*, this one packs in tons of jokes, references, and a lot of heart. It even goes an incredibly long way to make an appropriate reference to *A Christmas Story*, my favorite Christmas movie. At first, I found it a bit weird that Santa Claus was replaced with a Share Bear named Santa Claws here, especially since the game isn't shy about calling the holiday Christmas. I soon remembered that a lot of 80s cartoons pulled similar things, so this is just another case of *Saturday Morning RPG* being completely faithful to what it's paying homage to. The way the whole episode ends is just pitch-perfect, too. I see you, Mighty Rabbit Josh. You love Christmas just as much as I do. You're wearing a Santa hat right now too, aren't you?

There's nothing new in the gameplay department here, as you would expect from one part of an episodic series, but the encounter design is far better than it was in the earlier days of the game. While there's a fair amount of backtracking, the game gives you tools to make it go quickly, and there are even a couple of puzzles to solve to keep it from just being a series of battles. On top of that, there are even a couple of interesting secrets for those who search carefully. I think it might be the strongest of all the *Saturday Morning RPG* episodes so far, but I'll admit that I'm a bit biased due to the topic matter.

Santa Score: 4/5. Okay, Santa's a bear here, but the true spirit of Santa is alive and well in this episode. Plus, Santa's magic, so he could definitely be a bear if he wanted to be, I'm sure.

Festive Feeling Score: 5/5. Ho Ho Hood nails it as well as anything ever will. The essential moral of the holiday is intact, the ridiculous consumerism aspects are represented, all of the set dressing is right, and you're saving Christmas from a villain who stole all the presents. Add in a thick layer of references to other great Christmas specials throughout history, and I can't imagine any Christmas fan would be unhappy with this.

Those are just my picks for Christmas RPG fun, though. I want to know what you think. What are your favorite holiday games? Am I the only one who fires up *Christmas NiGHTS* every year? How will you be spending your free time during this festive season? I won't get to read your answers for a little while, but I still want to hear them. Leave a comment below, post in the [Official RPG Reload Club thread](#), or tweet me at [@RPGReload](#). I hope you enjoyed this somewhat unusual installment in the **RPG Reload**, or at least didn't hate it too much. We'll be back to normal operating procedures in two weeks. In the meantime, I hope you all have a happy and safe holiday season. I'll be back next week with one more special edition, and I'm sure you can guess the theme. As always, thanks for reading!

Next Week's Reload Hint: *We wish you a Merry Christmas and a*